DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 251 409 SP 025 360

AUTHOR Myers, Betty; Mager, Gerald M.
TITLE Choices in Academic Careers.
PUB DATE Oct 84
NOTE 15p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Academic Aspiration; *Educational Research; Faculty Development; *Faculty Workload; Higher Education; Noninstructional Responsibility; Professional Recognition; *Scholarship; *Teacher Educators; Teacher Motivation; Teaching (Occupation)

ABSTRACT

A long-term study of new professors in 14 graduate schools of education sought to identify the academic choices professors make early in their careers. A survey examined professors' hours spent in job-related work each week, tasks they committed their time to, tasks they felt they should commit more time to, and insights they reported about their experience of being professors. An analysis of their responses indicated that new professors spend only a portion of their time on research, scholarship, and the potentially supportive work of personal professional development, and that they would choose to spend considerably more time at those activities. The data suggest that those who are already working more hours per week than the average are not committing more time to research and scholarship. Despite their desire to apply themselves to scholarly pursuits and research, new professors find that they canot control the time they spend at work and that their choices are limited by administrative expectations and assignments. The conclusions suggest that exercising choice in an academic career is an important dimension of that work, but choices are not unlimited. (JD)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Betty Myers

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

✓ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

ED251409

CHOICES IN ACADEMIC CAREERS

Betty Myers
University of Oklahoma

and

Gerald M. Mager
Syracuse University

October, 1984

SP 025 [redacted] 360

Consider the work of a professor. It is effort which can be narrowly spent as by Browning's grammarian or as broadly exercised as by Alfred Kahn. A degree of choice is involved in the difference. Choosing one's own goals and the means toward them characterizes the work of professors. Having to make such choices and living with the consequences is the challenge.

Teaching, research, and service have been the traditional dimensions of professorial work. Ideally, the three dimensions intersect so that there is an integrity of effort. Research and scholarly accomplishments lend themselves to content and form in teaching; service follows from reputation in research and teaching, and gives but another forum for the exercise of skill and the display of knowledge and judgment developed in the area of expertise. Good professors apply effort in each, though they may excel in but one. Great professors have a command of each; their efforts are welcomed in teaching and research and service. But the ideal is less often realized. Professorial work is likely to be more scattered, more scrambled, less balanced. Perhaps this too reflects some degree of choice.

Several recent publications have focused attention on one of these three dimensions: scholarship. The Judge (1982) report explored the different pressures on schools of education, urging them at one and the same time toward both traditional forms of research productivity as valued in university settings, and professional relevance as seems required by the nature of education personnel preparation. No resolution of these dissimilar types of work was offered. A monograph recently issued by the Society of Professors of Education goes beyond description of this issue. Wisniewski (1983) argues that while the demands on the missions of schools of education may require quite diverse work of professors, one cannot adequately be undertaken without complementary work in the other:

> ...we must advocate scholarship at every opportunity. We must do so without devaluing professional service, which is absolutely vital to a professional school. Instead, we must advocate scholarship as a foundation for such professional service, as it must be for all programs and missions. (p. 10)

Agne and Ducharme (1983) suggested that careful study of the education professoriate discloses minimal differences between them and other higher education faculty.

A stimulating perspective for viewing professors' lives comes from stories and films. Professor Charles Kingsfield of "Paper Chase" fame spends his time developing the minds of eager law students. He is seldom portrayed locked in scholarly tasks. Rather, he is at his best as a classroom lecturer. Professor Kingsfield is an eminent teacher.

Si Levin, in Bernard Malamud's A New Life, is a young Easterner, just-become-professor. His specialty is English and American literature which, for purposes of the story, is the reason he can be employed at all. It is not clear from this account that Si Levin knows what to do as a scholar. Indeed, scholarship in this English department is something which older professors tried but would not overtly encourage their younger colleagues to do. The occupation of his time is not the production of a book, or the search for some new interpretations of Melville. For Levin, it is depa mental politics and personal intrigues that occupy his calendar.

Yet another professor recently on the scene is Professor Indiana Jones. He became famous, not for his classroom work, but for his thwarting of Nazi military plans in "Raiders of the Lost Ark." Interestingly, though his fine scholarship undoubtedly formed the basis for his heraided accomplishments, they were themselves not scholarship, but service.

Finally, another newcomer to the gallery of fictional professors is Helen Holm, wife of T.S. Garp. As a professor in a small liberal arts college, she excels

in writing instruction. Professor Garp may understand the nature of scholarship, but little is made of that part of her work; indeed, her life as a professor of English contrasts with that of her husband who stays home, cooks the meals, tends the children, and writes publishable novels. She is his unpublished critic, but he is the scholar.

Kingsfield, Jones, Levin, and Garp exercised some degree of choice in their academic work though their choices were quite different. This paper extends the discussion using longitudinal data about the work of real professors. Though the focus is on research and scholarship, other professorial tasks will enter into consideration.

The New Professor Study

In 1979, a long-term study of new professors in education was begun. The sample consisted of recent doctoral graduates of 14 high-ranked graduate schools of education. The majority have been surveyed three times and had had 3-6 years of experience at the time of the most recent survey. (The details of the study are reported at length in Mager & Myers, 1983a; Myers and Mager, 1981.)

Four questions were investigated in the study:

a) Approximately how many hours do new professors spend in job-related work each week?

b) To what tasks do they commit their time?

c) To what tasks do they feel they should commit more time?

d) What insights do they report about their experiences of being professors?

The results presented here will highlight choices about research and scholarship and are organized in four sections: work hours, clusters of work tasks, patterns of work, and insights.

Work hours. New professors work many hours in a typical week, some reporting inordinately large amounts of time. In all three surveys, the median work

week is between 50 and 59 hours though there appears to be a decrease in the number of hours in the third survey results. It should be noted that between the second and third surveys many of the responding professors received promotion or tenure at their institutions.

Clusters of work tasks. In the first survey, one objective was to obtain professors' own descriptions about the kinds of work they were doing. The traditional categories of teaching, research, and service were not presumed to be sufficiently discriminating for their purposes and, in reponse to two open-ended questions, hundreds of descriptions were given. Using an inductive categorization process, 21 categories of similar descriptions were formed and the 21 categories were grouped into six clusters of professorial tasks. Figure 1 shows how the categories were grouped, and identifies the clusters by letters A through F. Two clusters, B/research and scholarship and C/personal professional development, are the focus of this paper.

In the second and third surveys, the new professors were asked to divide their time among the clusters as they actually spent it and as they would prefer to spend it. Table 1 displays these data. (Though this table seems to invite comparisons of the two surveys, that is not a good use of it because the composition of the respondent groups differs in number and possibly character.) In the second survey research and scholarship is given less time than teaching, or administration and service tasks; in the third survey it is again third, though by a closer margin. Personal professional development, a set of tasks which might be considered supportive of research and scholarship, garners little time in either survey. From preference, the respondents would allocate more time to both Clusters B and C, and trim their commitments to Clusters A and F.

An attempt was made to determine if the number of hours a professor worked had some bearing on the number of hours spent in research and scholarship. Table

2 displays the data needed to answer this question. The 40 professors who responded to both the second and third surveys were selected and grouped by their reported work hours. As can be seen, though there are differences in research and scholarship time among the groups of professors, there is no consistent variance. New professors, in both surveys, who worked more hours did not necessarily spend more of that time in research and scholarship. Table 2 includes also the ranges of work hours for just Cluster B. These data evidence immediately that the means mask sizable differences among the professors.

Work patterns. Given that marked differences among the professors could be easily discerned, patterns of work were sought that might be used to divide the respondents for further analysis. Two prominent patterns were formed by judging how balanced or unbalanced the professors' workloads were. The workload was judged unbalanced if any particular work cluster garnered 28% or more of a professor's time than any other work cluster. If no cluster was emphasized over the others in that fashion, the workload was judged balanced. Patterns were identified for both the actual and preferred commitments.

Three points should be made. First, the great majority of new professors report an unbalanced workload. In their work, one of the professorial tasks is given much greater emphasis than others. Though most professors allocate some time to each cluster, it is either administrative and service tasks, or teaching, or research and scholarship that is typically emphasized over the other five work clusters. In most of the unbalanced cases, as might be expected, teaching was the professorial task emphasized. Research and scholarship dominated the workloads of relatively few new professors. Second, those new professors whose workloads were judged to be balanced commit time to all the work clusters, without emphasis on one over the others. Though they engage in research and scholarship, these tasks receive no special emphasis. Third, about two-thirds of the new professors in each group--

balanced and unbalanced workloads--would prefer to keep their workloads in that pattern, perhaps while making minor changes in time allocations.

An analysis was done to see how professors who reported particular work patterns in the second survey fared in the third. Each of the 40 professors was "traced." Somewhat surprisingly, there did not seem to be a relationship between (1) actual workloads in the second survey and actual workloads in the third, (2) preferred workloads in the second survey and preferred workloads in the third, and (3) preferred workloads in the second and actual workloads in the third. What this may suggest is that, at this point in their careers, professors' work patterns are highly changeable even over a short period of time. And change that occurs in their patterns is not always in the direction of their preferences. Preferences themselves were not particularly stable over the period between the two surveys.

Insights. Another perspective on the academic choices of professors in the early stages of their careers may be found in the insights and problems they mentioned. In all three of the questionnaires professors were asked to describe a recent insight or problem. The responses suggested three themes were prominent in the new professors' lives.

The first theme focused on finding time to do all their work which included setting priorities and balancing divergent demands. The brief excerpts below are illustrative of the comments on this theme in relation to research and scholarship.

> I like to teach, and I'm a good teacher; a much better teacher than a researcher. But, I would like to have some time to produce a quality piece of scholarly work, too. I feel the desire, not an external pressure, to produce something of high quality. (#414026)

> Easy to get overextended and let non-deadline scholarly work slip. Basically, a great job though. The time is mine to control. Few other jobs have those kinds of freedoms. (#114012)

It seems reasonable to consider the possibility that having limited time could lead the more immediate demands such as preparing for teaching to be given priority

over demands that are more distant even if they are regarded as more important. The demands of research and scholarship may be of the latter kind.

Dealing with peers and finding a place in the institution constitute the second theme. As a newcomer to the institution, the new professor may find the culture difficult to assimilate. The newcomer must learn how to read and respond to the values of the institution.

> Applying for promotion and tenure (currently) has brought out the stark reality that what is "expected" as usual responsibilities have little effect on the decision, in actuality! Extremely difficult to publish (or even write) with 4 individual course preparations each semester, office hours, and committee assignments. (#109019)

The new, multiple demands on beginning professors make it a challenge to discern what kind of work is important and rewarded. If the requirements for succeeding are subtle or uncertain, the new professor may not even know what they are. The work of finding a place in the institution is even more difficult. Not recognizing whether research and scholarship will be an important part of the promotion and tenure reward, that work may get no special attention.

The third theme, creating a life of the mind, surely finds its source in the research and scholarship focus of new professors. That focus may provide the continuity of professorial work. New professors may find it difficult to get others to treat their efforts seriously, if they attend to them at all; the stimulation provided by graduate student peers is gone and new collegiality may be slow to form.

> It is not as contemplative as I had thought. It is far more entrepreneurial than I had thought it would be. In many respects, the professor's job is for young people with high energy levels. Tenure is deadly, I can see it affecting views of work. I think tenure should have a term. Perhaps it should be reviewed every 7-10 years. (#410006)

> Besides the money crunch the problems are essentially the same. The academic regime is disruptive to concentration and sustained effort in one direction. We are pressured to produce, to be scholarly, to be serviceful, to be applied, to be well connected, to be well known, to do research that brings in money. There are too many conflicting demands. The tenure review throws a person in a position of isolation as in facing the inquisition.

> Also we are required to teach more than needs to be taught or than anyone wants to learn! The academic environment is singularly unsupportive of a person's efforts: we are alone in the classroom, we are alone in our research in our specialization, we are too busy to read each other's papers and we are too far apart to understand them. Assistant professors have to move themselves--this effectively kills any creative joy; it kills humor, inventiveness, and the spirit of true inquiry. One is either considered too young or too low to undertake more serious long term scholarly tasks, let alone theoretical ones. (#114033)

Understanding Where Choices Lie

Given these data about the work of new professors, what can we conclude about the scholarly ethos? What parameters of choice affect the work lives of professors? First, it is arguable that while the benefits of research and scholarship are well appreciated, other professorial tasks are better understood and receive more acclaim. Choosing a life focused on scholarship may be choosing a life devoid of recognition, unless some practical application of that scholarship is forthcoming. It is further arguable that in professional fields such as education, practical application through teaching, service, or public leadership should be a standard for judging scholarly success anyway. But such is not necessarily the case.

The second conclusion that we can defensibly reach is that new professors in education are encountering the scholarly ethos with some determination and some disappointment. While newer professors spend only a portion of their time in research and scholarship and the potentially supportive work of personal professional development, they would choose to spend considerably more time at those kinds of work. But they already work long hours during the week, and simply increasing their work loads is not a reasonable choice; they do not make it. Indeed the data suggest that those who are already working more hours per week than the average among these professors are not committing more time to research and scholarship. New professors would choose, instead, to rearrange their commitments to the various professorial tasks, emphasizing research and scholarship and personal professional development more.

Disappointment arises for new professors from the experience of not being able to control the time they spend at work; their choices are limited by expectations and assignments. It arises from realizing political, historical, and financial constraints on their amalgamation into the institution; their colleagues exercise choices for them and about them, and reportedly not always in their best interests. It arises from the tentativeness of creating and sustaining a life of the mind; their knowledge is sometimes taken for granted and sometimes challenged, but in most cases there are few colleagues who are seen as interested in their ideas. The sources of disappointment point to limits of choice. Some things are simply not the subject of choice.

A third conclusion that seems supportable is that the newer education professoriate is taking a somewhat different posture with regard to research and scholarship than its more senior counterpart (Mager & Myers, 1983b). This difference may be a function of the times, of the differences in the research focus of their doctoral programs, of their stage of development, or of other speculative causes. Of course, simply spending more time at these tasks does not guarantee greater productivity, however it is defined. But certainly when it is a matter of choice, it reflects a value position, and that holds the promise of more productive ends in the longer run.

Each of these conclusions suggests that exercising choice in an academic career is an important dimension of that work, but that choices are not unlimited. In some very important ways, professors do not get to choose what their work lives will be like. Engaging in scholarship and research, and more broadly, living the ethos in which that work can flourish, is one area of limited choices.

References

Browning, Robert. A Grammarian's Funeral - Shortly after the Revival of Learning in Europe, ca. 1854. in The Norton Anthology of English Literature, Volume 2. M.H. Abrams, general editor. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1962.

Campbell, Clark. The raiders of the lost ark. Westminister, Maryland: Ballantine Books, 1981.

Ducharme, E. R. and Agne, R. M. The Education Professoriate and the Written Word: An Interim Statement. In The Scholarly Ethos in Schools of Education. Symposium presented at the meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Montreal, 1983.

Irving, John. The world according to Garp. New York: E.P. Dutton, 1976.

Judge, H. American graduate schools of education: A view from abroad. New York: Ford Foundation, 1982.

Ladd, E.G., Jr., & Lipset, S.M. 1977 survey of the American professoriate: Technical report. Storrs, Conn.: Social Science Data Center, University of Connecticut, 1978.

Mager, G.M., & Myers, B. Developing a career in the academy: New professors in education. Society of Professors of Education, 1983(a) (in press).

Mager, G. M., & Myers, B. Study of the work time of education professors, 1983(b).

Malamud, Bernard. A new life. New York: Farrar, Straus and Cudahy, 1961.

Myers, B. & Mager, G.M. The emerging professoriate: A study of how new professors spend their time. 1981 (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 220 429 or SP 020 662).

Osborn, John J., Jr. The paper chase. Greenwich, Connecticut: Popular Library, 1979.

Wisniewski, R. Too Many Schools of Education? Too Little Scholarship? Ayres Bagley, ed. Society of Professors of Education Monograph Series, 1983.

Table 1
Means of Work Hours Committed to Six Work Clusters
Second and Third Surveys

Work Clusters	Second[a]		Third[b]	
	Actual	Preferred	Actual	Preferred
A	15.7	9.2	11.8	6.6
B	8.3	13.9	11.3	16.1
C	4.3	6.8	4.0	6.7
D	7.3	6.7	7.9	7.1
E	3.8	4.7	2.9	3.3
F	16.8	15.0	14.6	12.3

[a] n = 118. These data were transformed roughly from percentages to hours for purposes of easier interpretation.

[b] n = 47.

Table 2
Trends in the Means and Ranges of Hours Committed
to Research and Scholarship by Total Work Hours
Second and Third Surveys

Total Work Hours	Second Survey[a]			Third Survey		
	n	Mean	Range	n	Mean	Range
Fewer than 40	0	-	-	2	6.5	5- 8
40-49	3	13.0	2-27	14	10.0	2-20
50-59	22	12.6	2-41	14	13.6	5-24
60-69	12	13.5	3-26	6	10.3	3-20
70 or more	3	7.3	2-15	4	15.0	2-38

Note. n = 40.

[a] These data were transformed from percentages to hours.

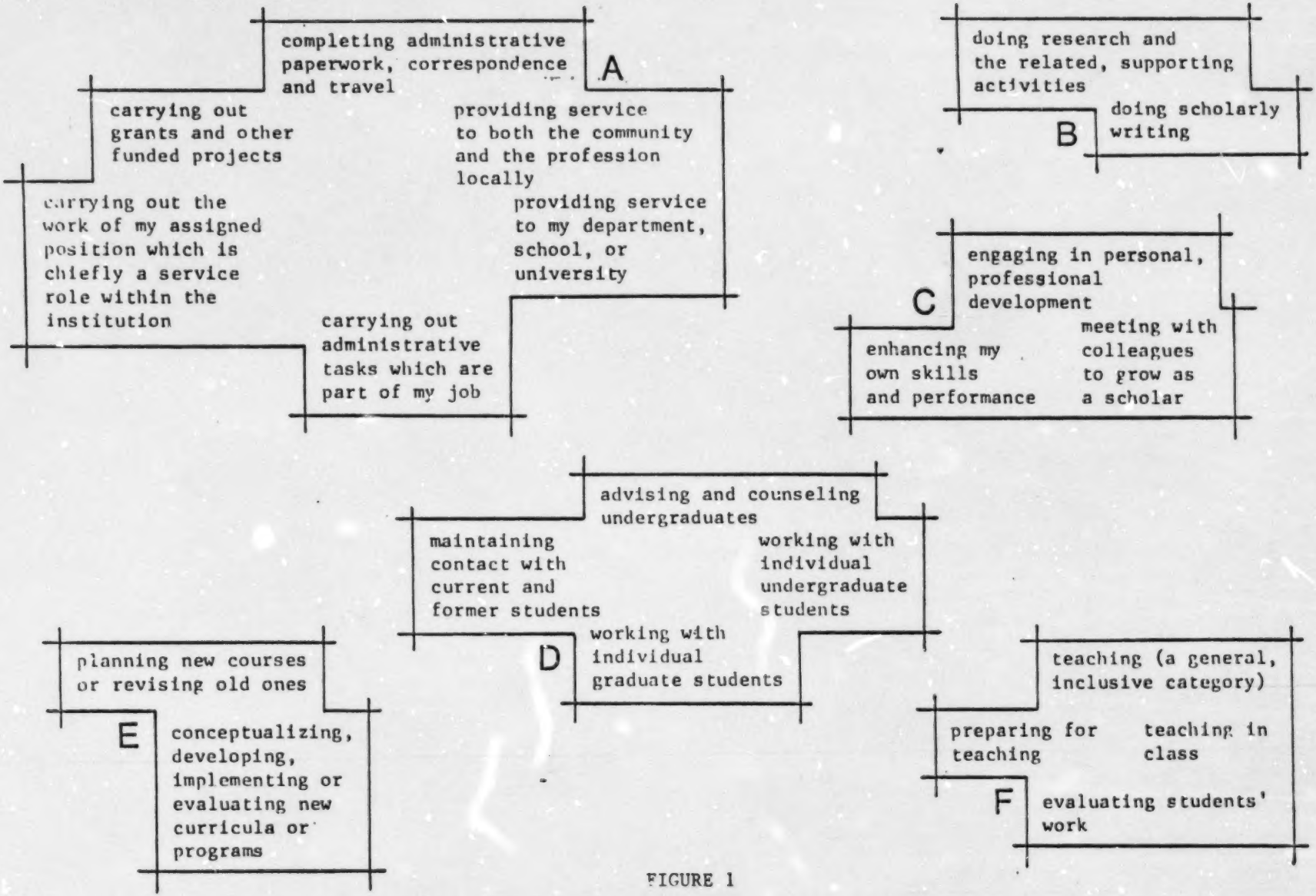
completing administrative paperwork, correspondence and travel
A
carrying out grants and other funded projects
providing service to both the community and the profession locally
carrying out the work of my assigned position which is chiefly a service role within the institution
providing service to my department, school, or university
carrying out administrative tasks which are part of my job
doing research and the related, supporting activities
B
doing scholarly writing
engaging in personal, professional development
C
enhancing my own skills and performance
meeting with colleagues to grow as a scholar
advising and counseling undergraduates
maintaining contact with current and former students
working with individual undergraduate students
D
working with individual graduate students
planning new courses or revising old ones
E
conceptualizing, developing, implementing or evaluating new curricula or programs
teaching (a general, inclusive category)
preparing for teaching
teaching in class
F
evaluating students' work

FIGURE 1

SIX CLUSTERS OF PROFESSORIAL TASKS

(from the New Professor Study, by G. M. Mager and B. Myers)